

UNUSUAL FEEDING OBSERVATIONS OF SOME TOP END BIRDS

Johnny A. Estbergs
c/o CSIRO Division of Wildlife
& Rangelands Research
P.M.B. 44
Winnellie. N.T. 5789

On several occasions during the late dry season of 1977, in a horse paddock near Darwin, an immature Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*, was seen sallying from horse back to catch food. The horses showed no concern at the Goshawk's presence on their rumps. Sometimes the Goshawk flew to a perch to feed on prey caught when it was scared up by the horses as they moved along. At other times it would return to a horse to feed. Grasshoppers were the only prey I could identify.

On 23 February, 1979 at Lee Point, Darwin, during low tide Whistling Kites *Haliastur sphenurus* and Black Kites *Milvus migrans*, were seen preying on soldier crabs *Mictyris longicarpus*, as they were moving over the exposed flats. The Whistling Kites ran along the ground catching crabs whilst the Black Kites swooped down to catch crabs, gliding off a short distance before settling to feed. The difference between hunting strategies may be accounted for by the difference in dominance between the species. Whistling Kites tend to dominate over Black Kites at feeding sites (e.g. at carcasses). To obtain food from a carcass, a Black Kite has to be there before Whistling Kites. Otherwise it is forced to wait until the Whistling Kites have finished feeding. Hence to feed on the crabs at the same time as Whistling Kites the Black Kites swooped in after prey instead of chasing them on the ground. This probably minimised the risk of aggressive behaviour by Whistling Kites.

On 8 July 1985 at Brocks Creek, Northern Territory, near Hayes Creek, two Pied Butcherbirds *Cracticus nigrogularis* were seen feeding on the nectar of *Eucalyptus miniata* flowers. For almost an hour, in short bursts, the Butcherbirds fed, and in the same tree, often quite close, the following species also fed:

Little Friarbird *Philemon citreogularis*
Silver-crowned Friarbird *Philemon argenteiceps*
Varied Lorikeet *Psitteuteles versicolor*
Red-collared Lorikeet *Trichoglossus rubritorquis*
Northern Rosella *Platycercus venustus*

During the period I watched I saw no aggressive or evasive behavior by any species. This seemed unusual as the friarbirds in particular are aggressive to many other honeyeaters and predatory species.

In September 1985, near Beatrice Hill on the Arnhem Highway, two Torresian Crows *Corvus orru* were feeding on nectar from the flowers of *Grevillea pteridifolia*.